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ABSTRACT

This handbook provides information about the school system in the United States and Illinois. Nine chapters discuss the following issues: (1) "United States School System" (e.g., how schools are organized and what kinds of schools exist); (2) "Enrolling in School" (e.g., how to enroll a child and what medical forms and examinations students need to enroll); (3) "The School Calendar and the School Day" (how long children are in school each day and holiday or special days when students do not attend school); (4) "Getting to School" (how children can go to and from school); (5) "School Procedures" (e.g., what to do if a child is sick and whom to ask about school procedures); (6) "People Who Work in the Schools" (who the people are in the school district offices and the schools and whom to talk wit at the school about one's child); (7) "Instructional Programs" (e.g., help for students who do not speak English well and programs for children with special talents and abilities); (8) "Parents' Role in Their Children's Education and Learning" (e.g., how to learn about one's child's school and how to help make decisions about the schools); and (9) "Adult Education" (where to go to learn English or take other classes). (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.) (SM)

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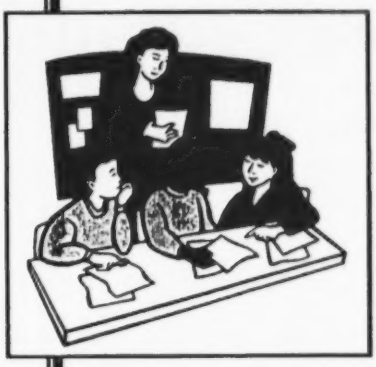

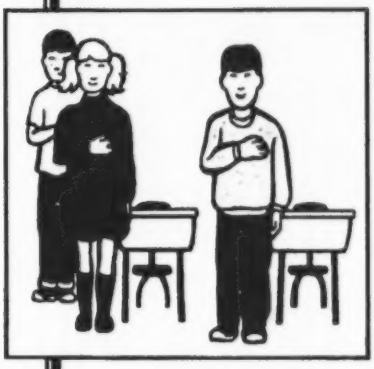

A GUIDE TO YOUR CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS

A Parent Handbook

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Developed by the
Adult Learning Resource Center
Des Plaines, IL

Funded through the
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ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Welcome. This handbook will give you important information about the school system in the United States and Illinois. If you and your family are new to this country or this state, you probably have questions about the schools. The information in this handbook is general information. You may have to call your local school for more details about your children's schools.

Parents and schools are partners in the education of children. Both want children to succeed. When parents and families get involved in education, their children do better in school and grow up to be more successful. By understanding how the U.S. school system works, you can help your children succeed and do the best they can.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

I. United States School System ____ 1

1. How are schools organized in my city? 1

2. What kinds of schools are there in the United States? 2

3. Are there schools for students who don't finish high school? 3

II. Enrolling in School ____ 4

1. How can I enroll my children in school? What papers do I need? 4

2. Which medical forms and examinations do my children need before they can begin school? 4

3. What if my children had these immunizations in our home country or another state? 5

4. Do my children need to see a dentist before enrollment? 5

5. What other examinations do my children need? 5

6. Where can we go for a physical examination? 6

III. The School Calendar and the School Day ____ 7

1. How long are my children in school each day? 7

2. Are there holidays or special days when children are not in school? 7

IV. Getting to School 9

1. How can my children go to and from school each day? 9

V. School Procedures 10

1. What should I do if my child is sick? 10

2. What if my child must take medicine in school? 11

3. Who should I call if I have questions about my child's health? 11

4. How can the school reach me if my child becomes sick at school or has an accident? 11

5. If my child must be late or absent from school, what should I do? 12

6. Can I visit my child's school? 13

7. Do I have to pay for anything in the school? 13

8. Who can I ask about school procedures if I have a question? 14

VI. People Who Work in the Schools 15

1. Who are the people who work in the school district offices and in the schools? 15

2. Who can I talk with at the school about my child? 17

VII. Instructional Programs 18

1. If my children do not speak English well, what can schools do to help? 18

2. *What subjects do my children study in elementary school?* 18

3. *What subjects do my children study in middle school or junior high school?* 19

4. *What subjects do my children study in high school?* 19

5. *If my child has learning problems or special needs, what can schools do to help?* 20

6. *Are there special programs if my child has special talents or abilities?* 20

VIII. Parents' Role in Their Children's Education and Learning 21

1. *How can I learn about my child's school? Is my child a good student?* 21

2. *How do I know how my children are doing in school?* 22

3. *How can I help make decisions about the schools?* 23

4. *What special activities can I attend at my children's school?* 24

5. *What are some ways I can volunteer at my children's school?* 25

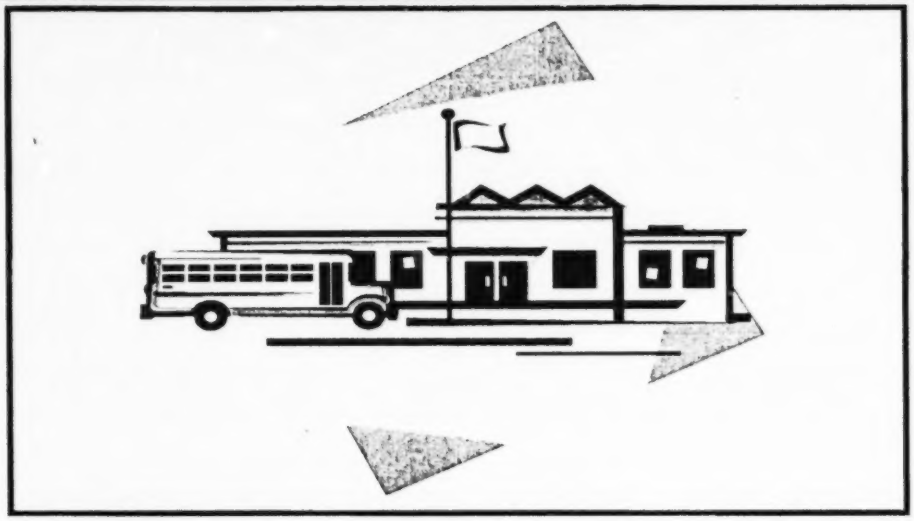
6. *What can I do at home to help with my children's learning?* 25

7. *What can I do to help my children plan for their lives after high school?* 28

IX. Adult Education 29

1. *Where can I go to learn English or take other classes?* 29

I. THE UNITED STATES SCHOOL SYSTEM



In Illinois, all children from the age of 7 to 16 must go to school. The school year begins in late August or early September and ends in June. There are about three months of summer vacation in June, July and August.

In the United States there are public schools and private schools. Public schools are free and private schools charge a fee called tuition. The money to pay for the public schools comes from property taxes in your community. If you own your home, part of your property taxes helps pay for public schools. If you rent an apartment, the building owner pays the property taxes. The building owner uses part of your rent for these taxes. The government also helps pay for public schools with other money.

1. How are schools organized in my city?

School Districts and School Boards

In the United States, the public schools are divided into districts. Some school districts include only one city or town, but other districts include more than one city or town.

Each school district has a school board. The members of the school board live in their school district. The school board makes decisions about the schools in the district. For example, the school board decides if the district needs to build new schools. The school board also chooses a superintendent. The superintendent is the director of the school district.

2. What kinds of schools are there in the United States?

There are several kinds of schools in the United States.

Pre-school (ages 3 or 4): Some children go to pre-school. In pre-school, children play with other children and learn to listen to the teacher. Children usually attend a few hours a day for 2, 3 or 5 days per week. Not every school has a pre-school. Some pre-schools are free and others charge tuition.

Kindergarten (age 5): If children are 5 years old on or before September 1, they can go to kindergarten. Children do not have to go to kindergarten, but most children do. They go to kindergarten Monday through Friday. Most kindergarten classes are half-day, and some are full-day.

Grades 1 - 8 (Elementary/Middle/Junior High School): School years in the United States are called "grades". Children attend school 5 ½ - 7 hours each day from Monday through Friday. Younger children usually stay in one classroom and have one teacher for the whole school year. Older students usually have 6 to 8 different classes during the day. They might change to different rooms and they might have different teachers for each subject. Schools for children in grades 5 or 6 through 8 are called Middle Schools or Junior High Schools.

Grades 9 – 12 (High School): Children usually enter high school at age 14 and graduate at age 18. High school students change classrooms and have different teachers during the day. High school prepares students for jobs or for studies at a community college or a university.

Before and After School Programs: Some schools have child care programs before school. At these schools, parents can bring their children to school before school starts. Some schools also have programs for children after school. At these schools, children may enroll in an after-school program for music, sports, homework help, or other activities. Some schools charge a fee for these programs.

You must enroll your children in special programs and give your written permission before your children can come early or stay late after school.

Summer School: Many elementary and high schools offer summer school. Some classes in the summer are for students who need additional help in school. Some classes are for special activities or topics, such as computer classes. There may be a fee for summer school.

After High School: Students who graduate from high school may choose to go to work or join the military. They might also want to continue to study at vocational schools, community colleges, or 4-year colleges or universities.

There are many private and public 4-year colleges and universities in the United States. Private and public universities and colleges can be very expensive. Students can apply for scholarships and loans to help pay for their education. Some young people join the military to get a free education.

Community colleges are 2-year public schools funded by property taxes and the government. They are less expensive than private or public universities. After attending a community college for 2 years, students can receive an Associate of Arts degree or transfer to a 4-year university to continue their studies.

3. Are there schools for students who don't finish high school?

Children must attend grades 1-12 to graduate from high school. It is very important to graduate from high school. Most universities and employers require a high school diploma. But some students leave high school before they graduate. They drop out of school. There are different programs for these students:

Evening Classes: Some high schools have evening classes for students who drop out.

Alternative High School: Some districts have alternative high schools. These are usually small schools in a different building from the regular high school.

GED Classes: There are day and evening classes to help adults pass the General Educational Development (GED) tests. Adults can use the GED like a high school diploma. Most universities and employers accept the GED. Local branches of public libraries usually have information about GED classes.

II. ENROLLING IN SCHOOL

1. How can I enroll my children in school? What papers do I need?

Papers that you may need for enrollment:

- Proof of birth date if available (child's birth certificate, I-94, or child's passport)
- Social Security Number if available
- Health Documents: Medical Examination/Immunization Form and Dental Examination Form
- Proof of address: (utility bill, apartment lease, valid Illinois driver's license, or notarized affidavit (sworn statement) of residency)
- Transcripts from previous school(s) if available. For example, parents may have school records from other U.S. schools or from schools in their native countries.

Ask the school for the list of papers to bring for enrollment.

2. Which medical forms and examinations do my children need before they can begin school?

The school has medical and dental forms you need to have filled out and bring back to the school. When the medical forms are completed, students are tested and placed in the class that is best for them, such as bilingual education class or ESL class. You might also fill out a "Home Language Survey" to help with this placement.

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When children enter school for the first time, they must have a physical examination. The doctor will fill out a medical form. The medical form includes immunization records. Children must also have an examination when they enter 5th and 9th grades. If children do not have the necessary medical forms completed, they will not be allowed to attend classes when school begins.

Immunizations: All students must have immunizations (vaccines) for the following diseases:

- Diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus (DPT)
- Polio
- Measles
- Rubella (German measles)
- Mumps
- Hepatitis B (for children entering preschool or 5th grade)
- Haemophilus influenza type b (for children under 5)

3. What if my children had these immunizations in our home country or another state?

If a child had some of these immunizations in another country or state, parents have to show a medical record to the doctor at the child's physical examination. If there is no medical record of the immunizations, the child must have the shots again.

4. Do my children need to see a dentist before enrollment?

Children may need a dental examination before they start kindergarten, 5th, and 9th grades. The dentist must complete a dental examination form for the school.

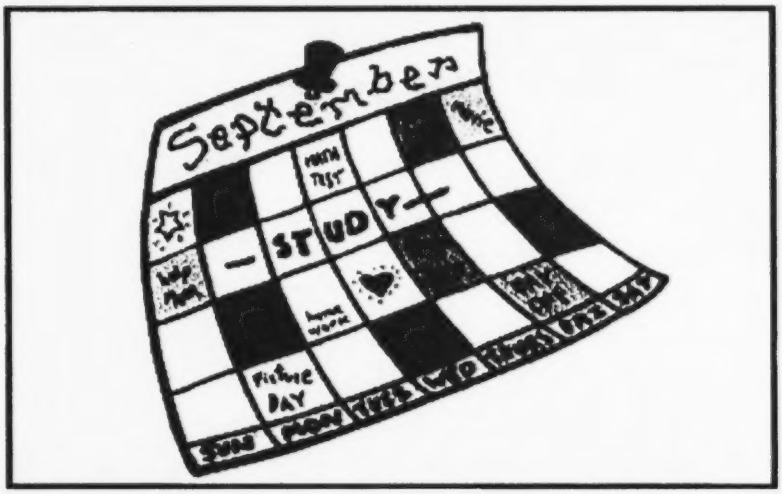
5. What other examinations do my children need?

In most elementary schools, children receive screenings for vision (eye), hearing (ear), and back problems. Children who wear glasses do not receive a vision screening. If the screening shows a problem with the child's vision, hearing, or back, the school sends a letter to the child's parents. If you receive a letter from the school, you should then take your child to a doctor or clinic for a complete examination.

6. Where can we go for a physical examination?

Children can have physical examinations and immunizations in a doctor's office or at a clinic. All schools have information about free or low-cost examinations and immunizations.

III. THE SCHOOL CALENDAR AND THE SCHOOL DAY



1. How long are my children in school each day?

Most schools begin in late August or early September and end the first or second week in June. The school day is usually about 5 1/2 - 7 hours long. Students usually eat lunch at school. Some children bring lunch to school. At some schools, children can buy their lunch at school.

2. Are there holidays or special days when children are not in school?

Most schools have a two-week winter vacation from late December to the first week of January. They also have a one-week vacation in the spring. Some national holidays schools might be closed for are:

- Labor Day: the 1st Monday in September
- Thanksgiving: the 4th Thursday in November
- New Year's Day: January 1st
- Martin Luther King Day: the 3rd Monday in January
- Presidents' Day: the 3rd Monday in February
- Memorial Day: the 4th Monday in May

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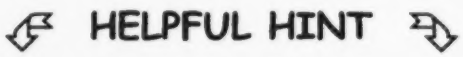
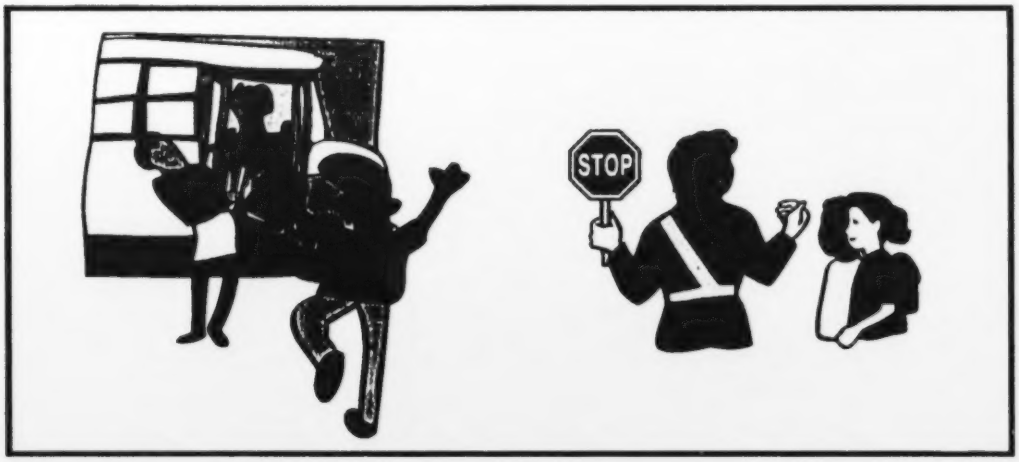
Schools are closed for other days too. Schools set some of their own holidays. There are special meetings for teachers on Institute Days. Sometimes there is no school on Institute Days, and other times children go home early. When children go home early, it is called early release. The school calendar lists when children stay home for Institute Days, holidays, vacations, or have early release. If your child needs to stay home for a religious holiday when school is not closed, call the school to report your child's absence.

School Closings: Sometimes schools close when the weather is very bad. For example, if there is a lot of snow outside or there is a tornado, the school may close. You can listen to the radio or watch the television news in the morning to see if your children's schools are closed.



Ask for a school calendar when you enroll your child.

IV. GETTING TO SCHOOL



1. How can children go to and return from school each day?

Children who live close to school usually walk to school. Children who live far from school usually ride a school bus or take public transportation. School busses are free or low cost. If your child takes the school bus, you need to know:

- the number of the school bus
- the place your child gets on the bus
- the time your child gets on the bus
- the place your child gets off the bus
- the time your child gets off the bus

V. SCHOOL PROCEDURES

1. What should I do if my child is sick?

If children are sick, they should stay home. Sometimes parents send a sick child to school because they have to go to work and can't stay home with the child. But a sick child often makes other school children sick. Most schools do not want parents to send their child to school if:

- the child has a fever of 100° F or higher
- the child threw up the night before or in the morning before school
- the child is coughing a lot
- the child has a skin rash or sores
- the child has lice (The parents must wash the child's hair with a special shampoo and remove the lice eggs from the hair. After this, the child can go back to school.)
- the child has chicken pox (The child must stay home for 7 days after the chicken pox begins.)
- the child has strep throat (The child can go back to school after taking an antibiotic for 24 – 48 hours.)
- the child has scarlet fever (The child can go back to school after taking an antibiotic for 24 – 48 hours.)
- the child has conjunctivitis (pinkeye)

Schools usually send a letter to parents if a student in their child's classroom has a contagious illness such as chicken pox, strep throat, scarlet fever, or lice. This letter will tell you what to look for so you will know if your child catches the illness.

2. What if my child must take medicine in school?

Parents should not send medicines to school with children unless it is absolutely necessary. Children are not allowed to take medicine by themselves at school. If it is necessary for a child to take a medicine in school, parents should write a note to the school nurse. The child should bring the medicine to the nurse's office. Some schools may need a doctor's note.

Parents should send medicine to school in the original pharmacy bottle, not in a bag or an envelope. The bottle must have a label with:

- the child's name
- the doctor's name
- the name of the medicine
- how much and when to give the medicine

The child must come to the nurse's office to take the medicine.

3. Who should I call if I have questions about my child's health?

If you have a question about your child's health at school, call the school nurse or health clerk. If you are reporting an absence, call the school secretary.

4. How can the school reach me if my child becomes sick at school or has an accident?

If your child becomes sick or has an accident at school, the school will call you or the person on the Emergency Card.

Emergency Card Information: The school will give you this form when you enroll your children in school. On the Emergency Card, write the name and phone number of the person to call if your child is sick or has an accident at school. It is very important to fill out the emergency card for each child and send it back to school.

It is important to write:

- the telephone number where you are during the day
- the name and telephone number of a relative or close friend
- the name and telephone number of your child's doctor or clinic
- any special health needs your child has

If this information changes at any time, contact the school and fill out a new Emergency Card.

Moving: If you move to another apartment or house, you should contact the school and give them the new address and phone number. You should also fill out a new Emergency Card.

5. If my child must be late or absent from school, what should I do?

Late For School: Children should not be late for school. Children should come on time to school. If children come late, the teacher will mark them late or tardy. You should call the school in the morning if your child is going to be late. Or you can send a note with your child to the school.

Absent From School: When your child can't come to school, call the school every day in the early morning before school starts. Some schools have an answering machine. Parents can leave a message on the school's answering machine.

When you call the school, you should say the following information:

- your child's name
- your child's grade and teacher
- why your child is going to be absent
- your name and phone number

Sometimes parents take their children out of school during the day before school is over. They may have to take their children to the doctor or dentist during the day. If you want to take your children out of school, you must write a note to the teacher. Your child should take the note to the teacher in the morning. The note should say:

- why you are taking your child out of school
- what time you will take your child out of school
- the name of the person picking up your child if he or she is not a parent or guardian

When you go to the school to pick up your child, go to the office and ask for your child. The school will ask you to sign a paper so your child can leave.

Family Vacations: Parents should not take their children on vacations during school time. Parents should take family vacations during school vacations. If you must take your vacation during school time, you should talk to your child's teacher before you go.

Make-up Work: Children who are absent from school must do the school work and homework they miss. If a child is absent from school for more than 2 days, most schools want parents to call the school to get the make-up work. You or your child's friend can go to the child's class to get the make-up work.

6. Can I visit my child's school?

Visiting the School: Parents are welcome to visit their children's school. When you visit the school, you must first go to the office for a visitor's pass. You can visit your children's classroom, but you cannot talk to the teacher during the class. If parents want to talk to the teacher, they must make an appointment in advance.

7. Do I have to pay for anything in the school?

There are fees for some school activities or materials:

Book fees: There are book fees for textbooks. If the book fee is too expensive for a family to pay, parents can talk to the school about reduced or waived fees. Your child must take good care of the books. At the end of the school year, your child will have to return some or all of the books to the school.

Extra activities: Sometimes there are fees for extra activities such as sports, music lessons, or academic or social clubs. Many of these activities are before and after school.

Field Trips: Sometimes students go on field trips to museums, zoos, and other places. Parents must sign a permission form before the child can go on the field trip. Sometimes there is a small fee to help pay for the field trip. Sometimes parents are offered a chance to volunteer to go on the field trip to help the teacher watch the children on the trip.

Lunches: If children do not bring their lunch to school, they can usually buy lunch at school. Most schools have a free or low-cost lunch program for parents that cannot afford to pay. Parents must fill out a form about their family income for their children to receive free or low-cost lunches.

8. Who can I ask about school procedures if I have a question?

You can call the school secretary or your child's teacher if you have questions about school procedures.

VI. PEOPLE WHO WORK IN THE SCHOOLS

1. Who are the people who work in the school district offices and in the schools?

School personnel are the people who work in schools. There are three kinds of school personnel: administrators, teachers, and support staff.

Administrators do not teach students. They are in charge of the schools. There are different kinds of administrators:

- *Superintendent*: The superintendent is the administrator of the school district.
- *Principal:* Each school in the district has a principal who is the administrator of the school.
- *Assistant Principal:* Sometimes schools have assistants to help the principals.

Teachers teach the students in the school. There are many different kinds of teachers:

- *Homeroom/Division Teacher*: In middle, junior high and high school, students meet with their homeroom/Division teacher for the first 10 or 15 minutes of each school day. During homeroom, students hear announcements and get information about the school day.

- *Classroom Teacher:* In kindergarten through 5th or 6th grade, students usually stay with their classroom teacher during the school day. The classroom teacher usually teaches many subjects such as reading, math, and science.

- *Bilingual Teacher:* The bilingual teacher teaches many subjects in the students' native language and in English.

- *English as a Second Language (ESL) Teacher:* The ESL teacher teaches English to students who don't speak much English.

- *Special Education Teacher:* The special education teacher teaches disabled students with special needs.

- *Gifted Teacher:* The gifted teacher teaches classes with more difficult work.

- *Music Teacher:* The music teacher teaches rhythm, singing and how to play a musical instrument.

- *Art Teacher:* The art teacher teaches painting, drawing, clay modeling, and other arts.

- *Gym Teacher/Physical Education (PE) Teacher:* The gym teacher or P.E. teacher teaches physical education such as sports and exercises.

- *Librarian:* The librarian teaches about the library and helps students borrow books from the library.

- *Speech Teacher:* The speech teacher helps students who have problems with pronunciation and speaking.

Support Staff help the administrators and teachers do their work. Some of the support staff are:

- *School Secretary:* The secretary answers the telephone, types letters and notes, greets school visitors, and helps the principal.

- *School Nurse/Health Clerk:* The school nurse or health clerk takes care of sick children in the school.

- *Social Worker/Counselor:* The social worker or counselor helps students with problems they are having in school or at home. The social worker may work with the child, the parent or the whole family. For example, a social worker can help a family whose child joins a gang. In high school, the counselor helps students choose classes and gives them information about colleges and jobs.

2. Who can I talk with at the school about my child?

In elementary school, talk to your child's classroom teacher first. He or she will help you or tell you who can help you.

In middle, junior high or high school, you can call your child's homeroom teacher first.

At the beginning of the school year, fill out the information in this chart about your children:

Child's Name	School's Name	School's Telephone Number	Grade	Teacher's Name

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VII. INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

1. If my children do not speak English well, what can schools do to help?

Students who have difficulty speaking or reading English may take English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual classes at school. ESL classes teach students to speak, read and write in English. Bilingual classes are taught in the students' native language and in English. Bilingual classes teach subjects such as math, science and social studies as well as English.

When students first enroll in school, they take an English test. The test helps the school place the students in the right classes. Students in bilingual or ESL programs take an English test each year. Students take ESL or bilingual classes until their English skills are good.

2. What subjects do my children study in elementary school?

The school curriculum is the subjects children study in school. In elementary schools, children study many different subjects:

- reading, language arts, and math (every day)
- health, science, social studies (2 to 5 times a week)
- art, physical education, library, music (1 or 2 times a week)

In elementary school, each class is about 30 or 40 minutes long. Children also have recess in elementary school. During recess, children usually play outside in the school playground. Recess is about 15 minutes.

3. What subjects do my children study in middle school or junior high school?

In middle school or junior high school, children usually change rooms for classes. They usually have different teachers during the day. They usually stay in the building during the day and do not have recess. The subjects they study are:

- Reading and Language Arts
- Physical Education and Health
- Science
- Social Studies
- Foreign Languages (for example Spanish or French)
- Music
- Math
- Computers
- Art

4. What subjects do my children study in high school?

High school students take required and elective courses. Required courses are subjects that all students must take to graduate. For example, English and math are required courses.

Some high school classes have different levels of difficulty. For example, an English class might be a basic, regular, advanced or honors class. Here are some of the different subjects in high school:

- English
- Math (for example, algebra or geometry)
- Science (for example, biology or chemistry)
- Family and Consumer Science
- Gym/Physical Education
- Driver's Education
- Computer Science
- Applied Technology
- Business
- Social Science
- Fine Arts
- Foreign Languages
- English as a Second Language (ESL)

HELPFUL HINT

Keep a folder for all school documents. Often children bring home school information for parents in their backpacks. This folder can hold information about the school calendar, bus schedule, school vacations, holidays, and other materials and announcements sent from the school.

5. If my child has learning problems or special needs, what can the school do to help?

Special education is a program for students with certain problems in school. These students may have problems seeing, hearing, talking, walking, learning, or behaving in class. Schools provide special education services for disabled students to help them succeed in school. If your child has special learning needs:

- Ask about the services available in your child's school.
- Tell the school what kind of special help your child needs at school.
- Ask for an interpreter at meetings if you do not speak English.
- Keep all important documents and letters the school staff gives or sends to you.

HELPFUL HINT

You can get a booklet about the rights of disabled students from the Illinois State Board of Education. Call (312) 814-2220 and ask for a copy of A Parent's Guide: The Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities.

6. Are there special programs if my child has special talents or abilities?

Students who have special talents or abilities are sometimes called "Gifted" or "Talented". These students can sometimes take special classes with more difficult and creative work.

VIII. PARENTS' ROLES IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Schools want parents to be involved in their children's education. Parents can be involved in their children's schools in many ways. They can:

- talk to principals and teachers
- attend school activities
- help make decisions about the schools
- volunteer at the schools

1. How can I learn about my child's school? Is my child a good student?

Schools have different ways to tell parents about school programs and their children's learning progress. Many schools have:

Open Houses are times for parents to meet their children's teachers, see their classrooms, and hear about what work their children are doing.

Parent-Teacher Conferences are meetings between parents and teachers. The teacher meets privately with each child's parents to discuss the child's progress or behavior in the classroom. Usually teachers ask for at least one conference during the school year in the fall. However, if a child is having serious learning or behavior problems, a teacher will ask parents to come for a conference at other times during the year. Parents can also ask for a conference any time there is a problem. Parents can call the teacher or write a note to the teacher asking for a conference. Often conferences are held before or after the school day.

Written Materials are mailed home or brought home by the children. For example, schools may send these materials home:

- School Calendars about classroom assignments, classroom activities, holidays, or school programs
- Newsletters telling what has happened in the classrooms and school
- Surveys asking parents for their ideas and concerns
- Permission forms for students to take field trips
- Announcements for school meetings, conferences, honor assemblies, school closings, and other events

Sometimes parents have to answer written materials. For example, you must sign a permission form before your children can go on a field trip.

Phone Calls and the Internet are other ways schools communicate with parents. Teachers often use the telephone to talk to parents. Sometimes you can have a parent-teacher conference over the telephone. Some schools have homework hotlines. Parents call a specific phone number and hear a message about their children's homework assignments. Some schools also have a school web site with information about school programs, classroom activities, and how to email a teacher.

Parents can call the school whenever they have a question and talk to teachers or the principal. If you want to visit your child's school, call the school first to make an appointment. You can call the school or send a note to the teacher.

HELPFUL HINT

If you have problems talking to someone at the school or reading English, ask someone who speaks English to call the school to explain the problem. Schools may have translators to help parents who speak little or no English. The school won't know there is a problem unless you tell them.

2. How do I know how my children are doing in school?

Report Cards: Report cards tell parents how their children are doing in school. Report cards list each subject children study. For each subject, there is a grade.

Parents receive their children's report cards 4 times a year. Children usually bring the report cards home. Some schools give report cards to parents at Parent-Teacher Conferences. Other schools send the report cards to parents in the mail. When parents receive the report cards, they need to sign the report card or the envelope. Then their children return the report card to school.

Grades: Most schools use these grades to tell parents how their children are doing in each subject:

A very good work
B good work
C average work
D below average work (poor work)
F fail the subject (flunk)

A, B, C, and D are passing grades. The grade F means that the child does not pass the subject. If a student does not pass a subject, they may have to take the subject again or do extra work to earn a passing grade.

Teachers decide what grades to give to the children. Teachers look at the children's school work, homework, and tests to help them decide what grades to give. Teachers also watch and listen to the children in class.

Interim Reports: Some schools give interim or progress reports. Parents receive these reports between report cards. In some schools, parents of every student receive an interim report. These interim reports tell parents how their children are doing in each subject. In other schools, only parents of students with problems receive an interim report. These reports tell parents about problems their children are having in certain subjects.

3. How can I help make decisions about the schools?

Parents can help school administrators make decisions about school programs. Schools invite parents to attend meetings for different parent groups. Parents can give ideas and advice about programs in their children's schools when they attend these group meetings:

- *Parent Advisory Councils* are groups of parents who give schools advice and ideas for improving special programs such as Bilingual Education.

- *School Improvement Committees/Teams* develop plans for how the school personnel, parents, and community can improve student learning.

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- *Parent-Teacher Organizations* plan programs to earn money for a school. For example, a parent-teacher organization might plan a book fair to sell books. They could use the money they earn to buy computers for the classrooms.

4. What special activities can I attend at my children's schools?

Schools often invite parents to special school activities. These activities give teachers, parents, and children a time to get to know each other.

Sometimes parents come to school to see their children in activities such as:

- *Sports Events* to see their children play sports such as soccer, volleyball, or basketball.
- *Plays and Musical Presentations* to see their children act, sing, or play an instrument.
- *Assemblies* such as graduations or honor nights to see their children receive honors and awards.

Schools also invite families to school to learn new information. Some of these activities are:

- *Curriculum Nights* show parents what their children will learn during the school year. The teacher may also explain what students have to learn for promotion to the next grade or to graduate.

- *Parent Workshops* give parents ideas about raising their children. Parents can learn how to help their children be healthy and successful. For example, a workshop may be about how to keep children in school and not drop out. Parent Workshops can also teach parents how to help their children learn. For example, parents can attend a workshop to learn how to read books to their young children.

- *School Orientations* are meetings for parents and new students. Often orientations are held for parents of kindergarten, eighth grade and high school freshman (9th grade) students. Parents receive information about the new school their children will attend. For example, parents may learn about the new school's dress code. Parents may also learn how to help their children choose courses.

Sometimes schools have social activities for parents and families in the community such as International Fairs, Parent Appreciation Day, and School Pride Day. Families come to the school to have fun and enjoy themselves. For example, they can taste different foods from many countries at an International Fair.

5. What are some ways I can volunteer at my children's schools?

Sometimes the school needs help with school activities. Schools ask parents to volunteer for different activities.

For Classroom and Learning Activities you might volunteer to:

- talk to a class about your job or your native country
- go on a field trip with a class
- read to a class or listen to students read

For School Programs you might volunteer to:

- help with a school dance
- bring in refreshments for a parents' meeting
- plan a fund-raiser
- help translate written materials

There are many ways for you to participate in schools. Schools need your help, ideas, and participation in your children's education. You are a very important part of your children's education. You are always welcome in the schools.

HELPFUL HINT

Schools may list volunteer opportunities in the school bulletin, on the school web page, or in a special announcement sent home from the school.

6. What can I do at home to help with my children's learning?

Successful students come to school ready to learn and have good study habits. There are many ways parents can help their children do well in school. You can help even if you speak very little English. You do not have to know English to help. Here are important things you can do to help your children's learning:

Dress for the Weather: Make sure your children's clothes are okay for the weather outside. For example, if it's cold outside, they should wear warm clothes such as coats, hats, and gloves.

School Uniforms and Dress Codes: In some schools students must wear uniforms to school. For example, a uniform might be white shirts and blue pants or skirts. Other schools don't have school uniforms, but they do have dress codes. Dress codes are special rules about the clothing children can wear to school. For example, in some schools boys cannot wear hats inside and girls are not allowed to wear halter tops. If your children are not dressed correctly for school, some schools will send them home.

School Supplies: Children need to bring school supplies to class. School supplies are paper, pencils, pens, and erasers. Sometimes children need other supplies such as rulers, scissors, or glue. Usually teachers will give students a list of the school supplies they need. If you are not able to buy the supplies, tell the teacher.

Talking about Schoolwork: Parents should ask their children each day, "How was school today?" "Do you have any homework tonight?" Schools want you to discuss schoolwork with your children. You can ask your children about what they are learning in their classes. You can also ask your children to bring home and show you their graded papers.

Helping with Homework: Homework is an assignment that teachers give students to do at home.

There are different kinds of homework assignments. Children may:

- finish assignments started in school
- do assignments that practice or review something they learned in school (such as reading or math)
- do special projects, such as book reports, science experiments or drawing a map
- study for a quiz or test

Teachers decide how much homework to give each night. Not all teachers give the same amount of homework. Older children usually have more homework than younger children. Here are some things you can do to help your children with their homework:

Homework Time: Children have many daily activities such as chores, appointments, playtime, after school programs, and homework. You can help your children schedule a special time for homework. It is best if homework is done at the same time every afternoon or evening, but not late in the evening. During homework time, you should turn off the television and video/computer games. Children need a quiet place to do their homework.

Looking at Homework: You can look at the homework to see if it is neat and clean. Your children can explain their homework to you. Sometimes children see mistakes when they explain their homework.

Problems with Homework: Sometimes children cannot finish their homework because they don't understand it. If parents understand the homework, they can help their children. But parents should never do homework for their children.

Many parents feel that they cannot help their children with homework. Sometimes parents don't understand much English or don't understand the subject. If parents cannot help their child with a homework problem, they should write a note or call the child's teacher. Parents can tell the teacher their child had a problem finishing the assignment. Sometimes children can get extra help with their homework assignments at school before school, after school, or during recess.

Sometimes children don't want to do their homework. They may find time to watch TV or play, but they never have time to do their homework. Often teachers will call or write a note to parents if a child is not doing homework. Teachers and parents must decide what will happen to children who don't do their homework. Teachers usually give them a lower grade.

The Library: For some homework assignments children may need materials from the public library. All library materials can be used in the library. If your child wants to take materials home or use the library computers, you must have a library card. You can get a library card at the library.

Reading and Talking Together: Children who read at home do better in school. It is a good idea to have family reading time in your home. During reading time you can read to your children or your children can read to you. Or everyone can read by themselves during reading time. It is important for your children to see you read in English or in your native language.

If reading is difficult for you, then tell stories to your children. You can tell stories about your family when you were young and about when your children were babies. Your children can also tell stories. You can tell stories in English or your native language.

Family Learning Activities and Family Resource Centers: Many schools and community organizations offer family learning programs in the evening and on weekends. Parents and children attend these family activities together. Your family can learn about subjects such as math, science, reading, and computers. You will usually receive materials to take home for more learning.

Some schools have family resource centers. These centers have materials that parents can borrow and take home. Some materials are about child development, nutrition, safety, health, the school, and learning activities. There are usually books, games, videos, tape recorders, and audio tapes.

HELPFUL HINT

Contact your children's school to find out if they have a family resource center or family learning activities.

7. What can I do to help my children plan for their lives after high school?

Parents should find out about the school staff who can help with their children's future plans. The high school guidance counselor can help families make decisions about what students do after high school. When your child starts high school, begin to talk about future plans. It is best to make decisions before the last year of high school. If children decide too late to go to college, they may not have all the courses they need. Students have to take certain courses in high school to prepare for college. Students also have to take tests in high school to apply for college.

IX. ADULT EDUCATION

1. Where can I go to learn English or take other classes?

There are many learning opportunities for adults. Many classes are free, but some charge tuition. Classes are offered in the daytime and the evening. Classes for adults are often held at community colleges, schools, libraries, and community centers.

Some adult education classes are:

English as a Second Language (ESL) – for basic English language skills.

GED and Basic Skills – for basic reading and math skills, and to prepare for the GED (high school completion) test.

There are also academic programs at colleges and universities. Academic programs prepare adults for college study and charge tuition.

HELPFUL HINT

You can get information about adult education classes from:

- **your child's school**
- **community organizations in your neighborhood**
- **your public library**
- **a community college near your home**
- **religious or ethnic organizations**
- **the Illinois Adult Learning Hotline: 1-800-321-9511 (a free phone call)**

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